

VZCZCXRO7751
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHMA #1070/01 2471706
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 041706Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9200
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY 0010
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUCRFA/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MONROVIA 001070

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W-AOKEDIJI, INR/AA-BGRAVES, AF/EPS, EB
AID FOR AFR/WA-SSWIFT
ACCRA AND DAKAR FOR FCS
LAGOS FOR AABDI

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [EFIS](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [ASEC](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [LI](#)

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: FISHERIES SECTOR UPDATE

1. SUMMARY: Liberia's fisheries sector is seeking to improve regulatory oversight and enhance monitoring and surveillance capacity following years of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities that have damaged the fishing industry and raided Liberia's abundant marine resources. Despite a rich marine environment, Liberia imports much of the fish products it consumes, and foreign operators who transship fish caught on the high seas to other countries are undermining local production. The Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF) is collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other international stakeholders to improve oversight and help revive the sector. Note: The value of Liberian fisheries production is not available. End note. END SUMMARY

FISHERIES OVERVIEW

2. Freshwater resources cover roughly 15,000 square kilometers (14 percent) of the total area of Liberia, comprising rivers, lakes, lagoons, creeks and streams that drain to the Atlantic coast. The Atlantic coastline spans about 580 kilometers, along which a continental shelf averaging 35 kilometers in width provides fishing grounds of almost 200,000 square kilometers. This Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is endowed with more than sixty species of marine resources, including shrimp, crab, lobster, tuna, shark, croaker, and barracuda. According to the FAO, the fisheries sector provides a means of employment and livelihood for 11,000 Liberians on a full-time basis, and perhaps hundreds of thousands more on a part-time basis. It is also a cheap source of animal protein for the population, providing about 65 percent of the animal protein needs of the country at the moment given the dearth of livestock. Fisheries are also a potential source of foreign exchange and revenue as export species such as tuna, lobster and shrimp abound.

3. Despite this abundance, fish product imports have risen quickly from roughly 40 percent of domestic consumption in 2004 to almost 60 percent in 2006. Domestic production of fish was 6,373 metric tons in 2006, while local consumption totaled 15,820 metric tons thanks to imports of 9,447 metric tons. Local industrial producers understate local production yields and figures by packaging fish products on the high sea and transshipping them to other countries. A pre-war FAO estimate for the sustainable yield of the continental shelf of Liberia was about 180,000 tons per year, and 40,000 tons per year for freshwater. Catch has however ranged between 10,000 and 20,000 tons per year over the last decade.

4. Liberian fisheries comprise both industrial and artisanal sectors, which deploy distinct vessels and fishing methods. Industrial companies operate a few dozen trawlers in both fishing and shrimping operations. The artisanal fleet consists of a range

of indigenous canoes from 7-meter Kru canoes using oars or sails and a 3-person crew to larger fifteen meter Fanti canoes powered by 25-45 hp engines and a crew of 15. There are currently five fish importers, all of which are Lebanese-owned: West African Enterprises; SHAM Incorporated; Caroline Foods; Cheautoui Brothers and African Fisheries. According to Abdallah Hamdan, General Manager of SHAM Incorporated, Europe and South America provide most of the fish imports.

FISHERIES CONSTRAINTS

15. The fishery sector is beleaguered by structural and regulatory constraints. The Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF) lacks institutional and financial capacity and has struggled to formulate and implement a National Fishery Development Plan. Liberia lacks a basic fishery harbor to facilitate the discharge of cargo and connection to distributors. Fish processing methods are primitive and operational costs are high because of the high cost of inputs. The aquaculture sub-sector remains underdeveloped due to the lack of trained manpower, research and funding. Import duties and landing charges for locally produced fish are also relatively high.

16. Meanwhile, the BNF also lacks the capacity to provide adequate surveillance and monitoring of the sector. Irregular and illegal fishing activities continue unabated, including clear violations of non-trawling zones, illegal transshipments of fish and fisheries products at sea, and use of unacceptable mesh and netting material by both industrial and artisanal fishers. Because of the lax surveillance and monitoring regime, Chinese trawlers engage in "twin trawling," a practice specifically outlawed by the BNF. Illegal transshipments to harbors in neighboring countries are a serious but unmeasurable drain on Liberia's marine resources.

MONROVIA 00001070 002 OF 002

17. The government has reacted to illegal activities in Liberia's coastal water by establishing a Surveillance Task Force. The Task Force includes representatives from the BNF, Bureau of Maritime Affairs; Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Finance, National Port Authority, and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). UNMIL has installed an Automatic Identification System (AIS) that will provide real time surveillance and data collection capacity to the task force. The system is undergoing testing and will be installed in Monrovia and other cities along the coast. The task force intends to procure a patrol vessel that will be used in conjunction with the AIS. Liberia does not have a Coast Guard but the GOL has established an inter-Ministerial Task Force to examine the legal groundwork necessary to establish one, and the Ministry of Defense is preparing a formal request to the United States for assistance in assessing Coast Guard needs. [COMMENT: AIS only tracks ships that have AID transponders. Fishing boats are not required by the International Maritime Organization to have transponders and thus AIS will not help detect illegal fishing. END COMMENT.]

PROSPECT FOR THE FUTURE

18. The revitalization of the fisheries sector is crucial and enhanced surveillance and regulation will lead to more revenue generation and job creation. The BNF in collaboration with FAO is currently conducting a socio-economic survey and livelihood assessment to determine the impact of fishing on communities close to the sea and inland waterways. Yevewuo Subah, Deputy Director of BNF, says the assessment will assist in determining how to engage communities and formulate policies that are proactive in meeting their needs. He noted that studies conducted in 2006 by the FAO using the Norwegian government research vessel Dr. Fridtjof Nansen to determine the stock status of Liberia's fisheries sector provided useful data that point to Liberia's huge potential in the sector.

19. AGOA eligibility provides an additional opportunity for Liberia to develop the export capacity of the fisheries sector, as will a fisheries agreement with the European Union that is scheduled to be

negotiated before the end of 2007. Both public and private investment is needed to rehabilitate port infrastructure to enhance industrial fishing and install refrigeration equipment and landing ports to accommodate artisanal fishers and increase their efficiency. An enhanced regulatory environment should attract foreign investment and build the capacity of Liberians to engage in processing of fish products for export.

BOOTH